

Postdeployment Homecoming and Reunion

Operation R.E.A.D.Y.
Resources for Educating About Deployment and You

Operation R.E.A.D.Y.

Designed for Soldiers and Families of the Active Army, the Army National Guard, and the Army Reserve

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Postdeployment Homecoming and Reunion

Soldiers

Operation R.E.A.D.Y.

Resources for Educating About Deployment and You

Homecoming and Reunion Soldiers

Facilitator's Guidelines

This section provides the facilitator with resources needed to plan and conduct a workshop.

Each workshop unit has **4 sections**:

- ✦ Facilitator's Guidelines
help the facilitator prepare for the workshop
- ✦ Workshop Overview
highlights key components of the workshop
- ✦ Workshop Plan
provides the facilitator with an outline for conducting the workshop
- ✦ Workshop Resources
include program activities, supporting videos, flyer, handout materials, and transparency masters

Topic: **Soldiers**

Goal: Soldiers can prepare for the challenges of reunion before returning to their loved ones.

Audience: This session is designed for **soldiers**. It is most helpful for this to be offered before reunion occurs.

Time Required: 2 1/2 hours

Room Requirements: This workshop requires a room large enough to accommodate the participants. It is designed as a group process for roundtable discussions, with 8–10 people at each table. The room should be arranged for maximum visibility of the flip charts, videos, and overheads.

Facilitator's Preparation

1. Reserve a location for conducting the workshop that will accommodate the number of participants.
2. Prepare flyers (master located under Flyer Master) and distribute them 1–2 weeks before the workshop.
3. Familiarize yourself with the goals of the workshop.

4. The facilitator's job is to lead the workshop, which includes distributing handouts and organizing group flip chart activities. Other tips include:
 - ☞ plan an ice breaker
 - ☞ encourage participation
 - ☞ check for understanding
 - ☞ prepare room
 - ☞ make workshop personal
 - ☞ gather needed material
 - ☞ enjoy yourself
 - ☞ offer amenities, such as parking and refreshments

5. Suggested activities are presented in square brackets ([]) in the lesson text.

The lesson text is meant to assist you and is not intended to be read aloud to the participants. The **suggested activities** list the visuals, handouts, or group activities that are used at particular points in the workshop.

6. Prepare overhead transparencies from the Transparency Masters provided:
 - #1 Soldiers
 - #2 Objectives
 - #3 Ways to Communicate
 - #4 Expectations of Change
 - #5 Areas of Readjustment
 - #6 Stress-Coping Skills
7. Preview the video, *Getting Back Together (710652/TVT 20-1048)*, and the accompanying discussion guide if you plan to use them in the workshop.

Note: A video is not used for every workshop. Determine if the participants have seen it and expand your workshop, if necessary, to show the video.

8. Prepare flip charts for group use.
 - Divide each sheet into two columns—**Joy and Concern**.

Prepare flip charts for facilitator use.

Divide one sheet into three columns—**Physical, Mental Attitudes, and Actions**.

Label one sheet **Helpful Resources**.

9. Reproduce the necessary number of handouts from the Handout Masters:
 - #1 Adjustments for Soldiers
 - #2 Homecoming and Reunion Brochure
10. Prepare table tents for group discussions:
 - Single Soldiers
 - Single-Parent Soldiers
 - Married Soldiers

11. Assemble all other necessary workshop materials and equipment

Workshop Materials:

- Flip chart paper on 1 easel and colored markers
- Extra markers for flip chart paper activities at tables
- Masking tape for securing charts
- Pens and pencils for participants' use

Equipment:

- Overhead transparency projector and screen
- Television and VCR

Soldiers

Workshop Overview (time 2 hours)

Estimated Time	Presentation Section	Visual-V	Handout-H	Brochure-B
10 minutes	Introduction Objectives	V#1 V#2		
10 minutes	Reunion Joys and Concerns	Flip Chart Activity (in groups)		
20 minutes	<i>Getting Back Together</i>	Video		
10 minutes	Group Discussion			
5 minutes	Ways to Communicate	V#3		
5 minutes	Intimate Relationships	B, Item #1		
15 minutes	Break			
5 minutes	Expectations of Change	V#4		
30 minutes	Adjustments for Soldiers	V#5 H#1, Flip Chart Activity		
5 minutes	Stress	B, Item #2 and B, Item #3		
5 minutes	Symptoms of Stress	Flip Chart Activity (Facilitator) B, Item #4		
10 minutes	Stress-Coping Skills	V#6 B, Item #5		
10 minutes	Sources of Assistance	Flip Chart Activity (Facilitator) B, Items #6 and #7		
5 minutes	Conclusion	H#2		

Homecoming and Reunion

Soldiers

(time 2📖 hours)

Introduction

[Visual #1: **Homecoming and Reunion: Soldiers**]

Welcome to the Homecoming and Reunion Workshop—**Soldiers**. We will be working in groups to facilitate discussion with others who have shared similar experiences and challenges.

This session is designed to prepare you for the challenges of reunion so that problems can be minimized and positive aspects of homecoming can be maximized.

Many of your loved ones have had a similar workshop session back home. The purpose of these sessions is to help smooth the adjustment phase of reunion for both you and your loved ones.

The material we will cover applies to all soldiers. Activities are designed so that you may benefit by working with soldiers who have had similar experiences.

Feel free to share your experiences and concerns. Sharing will help all of us to understand that we have a great deal in common when it comes to reunion adjustment.

At this time, please group yourselves according to your personal situation. Tables are designated as follows:

- Single Soldiers (unmarried)
- Single-Parent Soldiers (those who have children)
- Married Soldiers (with and without children)

(allow a few moments for groups to form)

Objectives

[Visual #2: **Objectives**]

During our time together, we will:

- Establish realistic expectations about reunion
- Develop an understanding of the 4 areas of readjustment
- Recognize symptoms of stress
- Identify helpful and reliable sources of assistance

Reunion Joys And Concerns

I would like to begin by asking you what reunion means to you.

(take a few responses)

The dictionary states that a reunion is the reuniting of people after a period of separation. Close your eyes for just a moment and picture what your reunion will be like.

Focus on some joys you expect at reunion time.

Now focus on some concerns you have about reunion.

(allow participants a few moments to imagine what reunion will be like, both the joys and concerns they may anticipate)

[Flip Chart activity (in groups)]

There are flip charts at your tables. For the next 5 minutes, I would like one person at each table to list your thoughts about your joys and concerns about reunion.

(allow 5 minutes to complete)

I'd like a person from each group to post their list on the wall.

(volunteers post flip charts on wall with masking tape)

Let's take a moment to compare lists. As you can see, many of you are looking forward to the same joys, and many of you have some of the same concerns. Let's discuss the common items you have on your lists.

[Facilitator leads discussion]

(allow a few moments to discuss the common joys and concerns from the groups' charts)

Getting Back Together

Expectations and fantasies are an important part of our lives. It does not matter if expectations are joys or concerns about homecoming and reunion.

No matter what you daydream about, you may not be physically or mentally able to carry out some of your expectations and fantasies.

There is no way to predict what homecoming and reunion will really be like. The video we are about to see, *Getting Back Together*, illustrates this point.

This video has been made especially for homecoming and reunion. The people portrayed in the video share how their expectations and fantasies are experienced when they are together again.

The purpose of the video is to assist you in understanding the adjustment process after separation. Issues raised in this video could apply to all returning soldiers.

As you watch the video, note the thoughts and feelings that both the soldier and the spouse are expressing.

A major strength of the video is that it deals with the things we just talked about—the joys, the concerns, the expectations, and fantasies of reunion. The video also addresses how couples communicate.

[Show the video: ***Getting Back Together***]

(allow 20 minutes for video)

Group Discussion

[Facilitator leads discussion]

Now that the video is over:

- What did you learn from it?
(take a few responses)
- What coping and communication techniques were used?
(take a few responses)
- What did you see in the video that applies to you?
(take a few responses)

(allow 10 minutes for discussion)

One thing to remember from the video and in our group discussions is that not only have you changed, but so have the people you are returning to.

All the problems you left behind have not magically disappeared. All the expectations you have about your reunion may not happen.

Thus, it is important to understand and accept that things back home will probably be different from what you expect.

Accepting change is a major factor in reestablishing yourself when you return from a deployment.

Keeping this change factor in mind, if I had asked the people you are returning to the same question about their joys and concerns, do you think your list would match with theirs?

(take a few responses)

Many of their expectations may be the same, but some may be very different. We are beginning to understand that our expectations and theirs may not coincide.

Ways To Communicate

[Visual #3: *Ways to Communicate*]

A key to understanding different expectations is in how well we have communicated during the deployment and how well we will communicate when the deployment has ended.

What are some ways we can communicate during separation?

(take a few responses—answers may include letters, cards, tapes, videos, phone calls)

Letters and cards are the least expensive way to communicate. Sometimes, phone calls are available during a deployment, but phone calls can be very expensive. Cassette tapes and video tapes are also good methods of communication.

Now that you are going home, what can you say or write besides reporting the current weather conditions, or discussing how tired you are of the food in the mess tent?

(take a few responses)

Before your return, you can start talking and writing about some of your expectations.

Lines of communications should be open and two-way. Encourage your loved ones to communicate their expectations for reunion.

Some **joy** expectations you might share are the same ones you listed on the flip chart paper. For example, you could begin by saying that you would like to go to a movie when you return.

Or you might tell your loved one that you would really like a quiet evening alone. In return, ask them what they are looking forward to.

You could also begin to share some of your concern expectations. Your old job will seem rather tame after the adventure of a deployment.

You may confide that you are concerned about what your relationship will be like with the children, your spouse, with your mother or father, or with your friends.

Continuous communication during separation plays a critical role in maintaining an emotional bond between the soldier and those back home.

By expressing your expectations before you return (it's not too late) and by asking the people you are returning to about **their** expectations, you are establishing a line of communication that will cross many barriers and minimize problems when you return.

Intimate Relationships

[Distribute Brochure: **Homecoming and Reunion**]

Among the major adjustments you face when you return are your intimate and sexual relationships. The best thing you can do is to go slowly. Don't anticipate "normal" sexual relations for a few days.

You and your partner are likely to feel like strangers with each other, and strangers do not have good sexual relations.

Take the time to reestablish your sexual relationship naturally. Rushing sexual relations can create major communication problems.

A few ideas that may be helpful during this period of adjustment are:

- Try not to rush
- Talk a lot about how you feel, and . . .
- Ask how your partner feels regarding intimacy and sexual matters
- Read brochure Item #1, **Reestablishing Intimate and Sexual Relations**, for other helpful ideas.

[Brochure Item #1: **Reestablishing Intimate and Sexual Relations**]

No matter how well prepared you are or how well you communicated during deployment, there are many adjustments to make upon returning.

Changes that occurred while you were away may cause you to adjust your way of thinking.

Let's take a 15-minute break. When we return, we will discuss change in depth.

[Break 15 minutes]

Expectations Of Change

Welcome back from the break.

[Visual #4: **Expectations of Change**]

Let's begin by discussing change. You can view change in two different ways. One way to view change is as a crisis or threat. The other way is to view change as either a hidden opportunity or as a slight disruption in the way things used to be.

If change is viewed as a crisis or threat, people try to pretend the change did not happen. They may use inappropriate coping strategies. They may avoid or deny the change. They may spend time wishing things were the way they used to be.

Another poor coping mechanism people sometimes use is to blame everyone else and everything else for the change. This negative behavior only leads to a dead end and may cause even more problems.

If change is viewed as a hidden opportunity or merely as a slight disruption in the way things used to be, then it usually is more readily accepted.

People who view change in this positive way acknowledge that change has occurred, and that it can become an accepted part of life. Often, this view of change mobilizes people into new ways of thinking, which leads to a fresh beginning.

What changes might have happened while you were gone?

(take a few responses)

Do you view these changes as a hidden opportunity or as merely a slight disruption of the way things used to be?

(take a few responses)

Do you view these changes as a crisis or threat?

(take a few responses)

Ideally, all change should be viewed as hidden opportunity. Remember that no matter how accepting of change you are, it takes time for the impact of change to become integrated into your way of thinking or acting.

There is no definite period for change to begin to feel normal. On average, it takes several weeks or even months, depending on the length of separation, and on your acceptance of change.

Areas Of Readjustment

*[Visual #5: **Areas of Readjustment**]*

Now that we have discussed change, let's look at how it affects our reunion adjustment. We will be following the activity Adjustments for Soldiers, as we discuss the various areas of adjustment.

*[Handout #1: **Adjustments for Soldiers**]*

These areas include family, social, environmental, and military and civilian employment. As we work through each area, you will be following the activity handout and writing your comments on it. Later, we will discuss these areas in our groups.

We will discuss each of the four areas separately. I will say a few words about each area, and then I will give you 3–4 minutes to answer the questions in that area.

When everyone has completed the activity, we will discuss the questions on the response portion at the end of the activity.

Family

The first area we will discuss is family. Please complete the questions in the activity column marked Family. Remember, family can be blood relatives or those people in your life to whom you feel very close.

(allow 3–4 minutes to complete)

Social

The second area of readjustment is social. Soldiers you met during the deployment will be returning to their homes. Others will go on leave to visit family. Still others will be transferred or sent to school. The camaraderie you have experienced may no longer be there.

You may suddenly feel like you're all alone because those you were close to are no longer around. Friends you had before deployment may have moved or established other interests. Please complete the "social" column in your activity.

(allow 3–4 minutes to complete)

Environment

The third area of readjustment is environment. Environment can be everything from getting behind the wheel of your car, to the weather, to what is the latest in music, clothing, or TV shows.

Environment can also mean how well you will be accepted by the community. Keeping these things in mind, complete the third column.

(allow 3–4 minutes to complete)

Military And Civilian Employment

The final area of readjustment is your career. Have people been transferred? Is your old job available, or has someone else taken it over? Are there new people in the organization?

What is your view of how you will be received if you are returning to your military assignment or former employer? Are the old familiar faces still there? Has the boss changed? Is the management style different or the same?

What are other changes that may have taken place since you left? Keeping these questions in mind, complete the "military and civilian employment" column on the activity.

(allow 3–4 minutes to complete)

Ask for a volunteer from each table to take a few notes on the discussion of each area. When everyone is finished, that person can report on what your group discussed about family, social, environmental, and military and civilian employment.

(allow 15 minutes for this activity)

Please note that all of you have a resource section on the back of your activity sheet. You can use this to record the information from your group.

(allow 15 minutes for group work)

May we now hear reports from the group volunteers?

[Group reports]

(allow 2 minutes per group report)

As you can see, a lot may have happened while you were gone. There is always the tendency to take the negative, or crisis, view of change. This is normal.

Some people want to overdo, catch up on time they have missed, spend money, and generally go full speed ahead without much direction. The most important thing to remember is to go slowly.

Reestablish a network of support with your loved ones and try not to let the stress of adjustment overtake you. The very act of being away from and returning to your loved ones can cause stress.

We will take the next few minutes to examine the symptoms of stress. We will also discuss some coping strategies, and give you some tips on where to go if you need assistance.

Stress

A point to remember is that people back home experienced different types of stress than you did. You had the opportunity to focus almost exclusively on your job while you were away.

Your loved ones, on the other hand, not only maintained the day-to-day tasks that already existed, but they may also have had to take on many of your day-to-day tasks.

*[Brochure Item #2: **Children's Reaction to Soldier's Return**]*

Children had to cope with stress and uncertainty in their lives due to the separation. A returning soldier must understand that change is often frightening for a child.

Depending upon the duration of the separation, a parent(s) may seem like a stranger, especially to younger children. Item #2 in your brochure, **Children's Reactions to Soldier's Return**, lists techniques to help you and your child adjust to reunion.

Soldiers with children may have to restart their relationship with their children. This can be a very stressful period for the child and the parent. Remember that both you and your children have experienced changes. Work slowly and lovingly to reestablish your bond.

*[Brochure Item #3: **Homecoming and Reunion Stress**]*

Take a few minutes to look at item #3, *Homecoming and Reunion Stress*, in your brochure regarding reunion stressors. You will notice that they mirror what we have discussed so far. This handout has very good information that can be used by all of you. Notice the helpful hints.

What events did you encounter during your deployment that may cause you stress when you return? For example what did you see, hear, or experience?

(take a few responses)

What do you think are some stressors people back home have experienced while you were gone?

(take a few responses)

Symptoms Of Stress

Many symptoms of stress are the same, no matter what the cause. Think about the last time you were under stress.

How did you feel physically?

[Flip Chart activity (Facilitator)]

(facilitator writes responses on flip chart in “physical” column)

What was your mental attitude?

(facilitator writes responses on flip chart in “mental attitude” column)

How did you act toward other people?

(facilitator writes responses on flip chart in “actions” column)

You may experience many of these symptoms when you return. But there is often a period called the “honeymoon period” that you may experience. Everything will seem new and exciting. Just being back around your old buddies, family, and surroundings will keep you excited for a time.

However, the honeymoon period will end. That is when stress often sets in—when you realize things are not living up to your expectations and fantasies. In fact, things have changed and you may become “stressed out.”

*[Brochure Item #4: **Stress Symptoms**]*

Take just a moment and look at item #4, **Stress Symptoms**, in your brochure. These are the symptoms you should be aware of both now, and when you return home. They may occur not only to you, but also to your loved ones.

Please take a minute to look at the list. Be aware of any symptoms you may have experienced. When you return home from your next deployment, refer to it again to check your stress level.

(allow a moment for participants to review handout)

Stress-Coping Skills

*[Visual #6: **Stress-Coping Skills**]*

The important thing to remember about stress is that everyone handles it differently. There are 4 areas that will assist you in coping with stress and adjustment after deployment. These areas are:

Personal **management skills** include organizing your time and energy around your priorities and following through on your commitments.

- Personal management skills
- Relationship skills
- Outlook skills
- Self-care skills

How do you develop good personal management skills?

[Facilitator leads discussion]

(answers may include goal setting, time management, learning new skills)

Relationship skills include sharing your joys and concerns with others—being open and honest. Listening to others is also very important.

How do you develop good relationship skills?

(answers may include listening, improve personal connections, make time for yourself, understanding other people's stress)

Outlook skills include learning to be flexible to the changes you will encounter, and looking for new and creative options.

How do you develop good outlook skills?

(answers may include being able to laugh at yourself, appreciating your skills and accomplishments, and having pride in yourself)

Self-care skills include finding outlets for your stress and tension. How do you develop good self-care skills?

(answers may include exercising, relaxing, good nutrition, being kind to yourself)

As we have said before, many military families find the stress encountered during reunion more difficult than the separation itself.

A list of strategies you may use to make life easier for you and your family during this critical adjustment period is in your brochure in Item #5, **Reunion Stress-Coping Strategies**.

*[Brochure Item #5: **Reunion Stress-Coping Strategies**]*

Sources Of Assistance

[Flip Chart activity (Facilitator)]

What if you notice that you are experiencing many of the stress symptoms from Item #4, **Stress Symptoms** list?

Where could you get assistance about your concerns and the stress you may be encountering before you return?

(record answers on the flip chart)

[See Brochure Items #6 and #7: **Sources of Support and Assistance**, and **Other Sources of Assistance**]

There is no shame in asking for assistance from professionals who are trained to help you. Item #6 in your brochure, **Sources of Support and Assistance**, lists assistance sources for you.

Item #7, **Other Sources of Assistance**, is blank. If you will record the information we have written on the flip chart paper in your brochure under Item #8, you will have additional resources to contact if you should need assistance here or when you return home.

Anyone in your chain of command can tell you how to get in touch with any of the organizations that we have listed. Most of them are listed in your post or civilian phone books.

Not all of the organizations on the list will be available while you are deployed, but many of them are. The key is to ask for the assistance if you need it.

Conclusion

Reunion may be a challenge. If you begin right now to communicate your expectations and encourage those back home to do the same, the transition will be easier.

Keep in mind that there will be stress due to the changes that have occurred. Remember to look at change as a hidden opportunity or a slight disruption, and not as a crisis or dead end. A positive outlook will make for a smoother adjustment.

When you return home, there will be workshop sessions to cover such areas as adjusting to relationships with your spouse and children, positive communication strategies, and resolving interpersonal conflicts.

Check with your commander, first sergeant, or family support group leader for more information about these sessions.

Handout #2

Homecoming and Reunion Soldiers

Do you have realistic expectations about reunion?

Do you understand the 4 areas of readjustment?

Can you recognize symptoms of stress?

This workshop will provide you with:

- ✦ take-home information
- ✦ checklists
- ✦ practical ideas
- ✦ opportunity to meet people with common interests

Join us at _____

For a workshop on _____

Date _____

For more information contact _____

See you there!

Postdeployment Homecoming and Reunion

Soldiers

Operation R.E.A.D.Y.
Resources for Educating About Deployment and You

Objectives

- ✍ Establish realistic expectations about reunion
- ✍ Understand the 4 areas of readjustment
- ✍ Recognize symptoms of stress
- ✍ Identify helpful and reliable sources of assistance

Ways to Communicate During Deployment

?

Expectations Of Change

**Crisis or
Threat**

**Hidden
Opportunity**

**Avoidance or Denial
Blame Others**

**Acknowledgment
Action**



Dead End



Beginning

Areas of Readjustment

☐ **Family**

☐ **Social**

☐ **Environment**

☐ **Job**

Stress-Coping Skills

➤ Personal Management

➤ Relationship

➤ Outlook

➤ Self Care

Adjustments for Soldiers

	Family	Social	Environmental	Military and Civilian Employment
What changes or adjustments may be waiting for you at home?				
What can you do about these changes, if anything?				
Do you want to do anything?				
How could you benefit from these changes?				

Workshop Evaluation*

1. Did you understand the objectives of this workshop? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Do you think these objectives were met? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. If you answered No to either 1 or 2, please explain your answer below:
4. Circle the word which best describes the effectiveness of this workshop:

Inadequate Marginally Effective Effective Very Effective Outstanding
5. Based on your above response, what are your suggestions for improving this workshop?
6. How did you benefit from this workshop?
7. Did this workshop meet the needs of the participants? ☐ Yes ☐ No
8. Circle the word which best describes the facilitator's presentation:

Inadequate Marginally Effective Effective Very Effective Outstanding
9. Please share your comments about the facilitator's presentations?
10. If you were the next facilitator to lead this workshop, how would you improve it?

*Use the back of this sheet to continue your responses, if necessary.

Homecoming and Reunion

Reestablishing Intimate and Sexual Relations

One adjustment you may face when military separation occurs is reestablishing your intimate and sexual relationships.

Most military couples face the question, “How can two people work together toward achieving intimacy when one of them is often absent from the relationship for extended periods?”

Military couples often find that reunion may bring out feelings of uneasiness, and that their personal relationship is strained. Through an understanding of the effects of separation, you can better cope with the stress that accompanies reunion.

The following information about communication barriers and enhancers may help you to reconnect with your partner

Barriers to intimate communication and sexual relations:

- Unrealistic fantasies and expectations.
- Feeling anxiety about engaging in intimacy and sex.
- Feeling that your partner is a stranger.
- Feelings of anger, hostility, stress, or negative feelings about the separation.
- Concern about faithfulness to your relationship.
- Feeling that sexual relations need to be rushed to make up for lost time.

Communication enhancers:

- Communication will help bring you closer together. It gives you time to become reacquainted, and helps to let your partner know how you feel.
- Understand that feelings of anxiety are a very normal part of the reunion process.
- You have been apart from each other and you both have grown. Take time to get to know each other again.
- Discuss your negative feelings and frustrations. Fear of losing your partner plays a major role in developing negative feelings. Listen carefully to what your partner is trying to communicate to you.
- Don't assume the worst about your partner. If you have concerns about fidelity, talk to your chaplain or find a counselor who can help you work through these feelings.
- Besides communication, allow yourself time to readjust to being together again. Go slowly and enjoy your reunion.

Children's Reaction to Soldier's Return	
Reactions	Techniques
Birth to 1 Year	
Cries Fusses Pulls away from you Clings to spouse or caregiver Has problems with elimination Changes their sleeping and eating habits Does not recognize you	Hold Hug Bathe and change Feed and play Relax
1 to 3 Years	
Shyness Clinging Does not recognize you Cries Has temper tantrums Regresses - no longer toilet trained	Don't force holding, hugging, kissing Give them space Give them time to warm up Be gentle and fun Sit at their level
3 to 5 Years	
Demonstrates anger Acts out to get your attention; needs proof you're real Is demanding Feels guilty for making parent go away Talks a lot to bring you up to date	Listen to them Accept their feelings Play with them Reinforce that you love them Find out the new things on TV, at preschool, books
5 to 12 Years	
Isn't good enough Dreads your return because of discipline Boasts about Army and parent	Review pictures, school work, activities, scrap books Praise what they have done Try not to criticize
13 to 18 Years	
Is excited Feels guilty because they don't live up to standards Is concerned about rules and responsibilities Feels too old or is unwilling to change plans to accommodate parent Is rebellious	Share what has happened with you Listen with undivided attention Don't be judgmental Don't tease about fashion, music Respect privacy and friends

Homecoming and Reunion Stress

Whether you are a single or a married soldier, a single-parent soldier, a spouse, or a child, you will face certain stressors associated with Homecoming and Reunion. Below are some of the normal stressors you may face, along with some hints to help you adjust to the changes in your life.

Stressors

- ℞ Emotional letdown
- ℞ Restlessness or sleeplessness
- ℞ No one understands what I have been through
- ℞ Was my spouse faithful?
- ℞ Did my spouse miss me?
- ℞ My friends seem different
- ℞ I didn't expect things to change
- ℞ Other people's concerns seem petty
- ℞ I feel like a stranger at home
- ℞ How will the children react?
- ℞ Will the role I have filled change?
- ℞ Were my children treated well by their guardian?
- ℞ Can I make up for lost time?
- ℞ Did I handle things the right way?
- ℞ When will things feel normal again?
- ℞ I am concerned about finances
- ℞ I am concerned about future deployments
- ℞ The children appear confused and uncertain

Helpful Hints

- ℞ Accept that things may be different
- ℞ Talk about your experiences
- ℞ Go slowly—don't try to make up for lost time
- ℞ Spend quality time with your children
- ℞ Reassure your children. Change often frightens them
- ℞ Curb your desire to take control or to spend money
- ℞ Accept that your partner may be different
- ℞ Intimate relationships may be awkward at first
- ℞ Take time to get reacquainted
- ℞ Forget your fantasies. Reality may be quite different
- ℞ Take time to readjust
- ℞ Communicate with your partner and your family

Stress Symptoms

The following Stress Danger Signals focus on the medical and physical symptoms common to tension stress. Your physician can best determine your medical condition, but these guidelines will provide you with a general indication of your stress level. Check those signals which you have noticed:

- General irritability, hyperexcitability, depression
- Pounding of the heart
- Dryness of mouth and throat
- Impulsive behavior, emotional instability
- Overpowering urge to cry or run
- Inability to concentrate, flight of thoughts
- Feelings of unreality, weakness, dizziness, fatigue
- Floating anxiety, being afraid and not knowing why
- Emotional tension and alertness
- Trembling, nervous tics, easily startled
- High-pitched, nervous laughter
- Stuttering, other speech difficulties
- Bruxism, or grinding of the teeth
- Insomnia
- Hyperactivity, increased tendency to move about
- Excessive sweating
- Frequent need to urinate
- Diarrhea, indigestion, queasiness, vomiting
- Migraine headaches
- Pain in neck or lower back
- Loss of appetite or excessive appetite
- Increased use of prescribed drugs
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Nightmares
- Accident proneness

The more signs that are present, the stronger the likelihood that there is a serious problem. See your physician if you are concerned about these symptoms.

Reunion Stress-Coping Strategies

Most military families find that reunions are at least as stressful as separations. This seems to be true for couples with children, couples without children, single parents, and single soldiers coming back to friends and family. Following are some coping strategies which may help:

Expect to have a few doubts and worries.

- ☞ Your partner may think you don't need them anymore.
- ☞ Anxiety is a natural and normal part of getting back together.

Forget your fantasies.

- ☞ Give up any fantasies or expectations you may have about what homecoming day should be.
- ☞ Take it easy and let things happen naturally.

Don't expect things to be exactly they way they were before the separation.

- ☞ You've changed, your spouse has changed and your children have changed.
- ☞ Don't get upset by things that are done differently.

Tips on helping children adjust:

- ☞ Children can get angry about their parent being gone.
- ☞ Toddlers and preschoolers may act like the homecoming parent is a stranger. They might not understand about "duty" or "mission".
- ☞ Elementary school children and teenagers may understand, but show anger or fear by "acting out."
- ☞ Get reacquainted and take things slowly.
- ☞ Children are resilient.

Accept and share your feelings.

- ☞ Talk a lot about your feelings, and let your partner talk too.
- ☞ Really listen. Make sure you fully understand what your partner is saying before you respond.
- ☞ Communication is the key.

See things from the other person's point of view.

- ☞ An awareness that the soldier no longer feels a part of things helps us to understand why they can be upset by even the smallest changes.
- ☞ Recognition of the pride a partner feels in the way he/she handled everything alone will help the soldier to understand the importance of accepting changes made during separation.
- ☞ Children are people too. Try to understand how they feel. Change and uncertainty is often very frightening for them, so be patient.

Your family relationships should regain normalcy in a few months. However, if you had problems before you left, those problems may still be there when you get back. If you continue having problems adjusting after a few months, seek help through one of the following offices:

- ✧ The Army Community Service Center
- ✧ Family Program Coordinator
- ✧ Family Support Group leader for referrals
- ✧ Chaplain—a good source for confidential counseling
- ✧ Red Cross
- ✧ Social Work Services
- ✧ Community Service agencies—see your local phone book (e.g., Mental Health Department, Social Services Department)

If deployment was to a war zone, natural disaster or urban riots, be alert for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Symptoms of this disorder include:

- ✧ Depression—chronic numb or flat feeling.
- ✧ Isolation—feeling withdrawn from family and friends.
- ✧ Alienation—absence of meaningful contact with others.
- ✧ Avoidance of feelings—inability to feel or express feelings.
- ✧ Rage—bouts of unexplained anger; may be internal or acted out.
- ✧ Anxiety—unexplained nervousness, tension or hyperalert feelings.
- ✧ Sleep disturbances—insomnia, nightmares, etc.
- ✧ Intrusive thoughts—recollections of traumatic experiences that appear for no apparent reason.
- ✧ Startle responses—unusual, involuntary reactions to loud noises, i.e., automobile backfire.

PTSD probably won't go away on its own. It needs to be treated. If you or your spouse experience 4 or more of these symptoms regularly, seek professional help through one of the agencies listed above.

Sources of Support and Assistance for Army Soldiers and Families

1. *Army Community Service (ACS)*: ACS is the mainstay of family assistance for the Army on or near installations. It is staffed by paid professionals and volunteers. Among the services provided are Financial Management Assistance; Exceptional Family Members Program; Child Support Services; Family Advocacy; Relocation Services; and Information, Referral, and Follow-up.
2. *Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve Family Program Coordinator Offices*: Although not staffed at ACS levels, these offices provide information and referral services on all of the above-listed services, both military and civilian, for the families of Reserve Component members who normally reside away from Army installations.
3. *Family Assistance Center (FAC)*: FACs may be established on and off Army installations during periods of lengthy deployment. FACs provide assistance and information and referral on such matters as ID cards and DEERS, health care, legal matters, financial counseling and assistance, and family support.
4. *Rear Detachment*: A military unit may create a Rear Detachment when it deploys for extended periods of time. It is the primary point of contact for family members who have questions or who need assistance prior to and during separations.
5. *Family Support Group (FSG)*: The FSG is organized to provide mutual support for a unit's family members. It is affiliated with a specific military unit, ARNG Armory, or USAR Center. The FSG forms the third component of the Army's family support system during deployment. It operates during periods of normal operations as well, in close coordination with the affiliated unit and, if convenient, with ACS or the Reserve Family Program Coordinator's office.
6. *Installation Chaplain*: A good source for confidential counseling.

Other Sources of Support and Assistance for Soldiers and Families

Name

Location

Phone

[illegible]